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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the use of the Cypriot Greek dialect (CG) in radio commercials of the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) over a period of ten years. CG, the language of everyday interaction in Cypriot villages, is distinguished from the other language variety commonly used, one closer to standard modern Greek. Analysis of the radio commercials in CG focuses on why this variety is chosen in certain commercials, principally those for traditional food products, locally manufactured products competitive with similar imported products, and products whose possession indicates maintenance of traditional values. It is concluded that CG is used to appeal to rural lower and middle class consumers who embody the values of traditional Cypriot society. The most important values, as deduced from the commercials themselves, include consumption of traditional foods, exclusive use of Cypriot products, and priority of family. These commercials also tend to be broadcast at a single peak listening time, after church and before the traditional family meal on Sundays. (MSE)

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# THE USE OF THE CYPRIOT-GREEK DIALECT IN THE COMMERCIALS OF THE CYPRUS BROADCASTING CORPORATION

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# THE USE OF THE CYPRIOT-GREEK DIALECT IN THE COMMERCIALS OF THE CYPRUS BROADCASTING CORPORATION

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This paper will support, on the basis of an analysis of taped commercials from the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation, that in cases of multi-dialectal societies the local dialect has a more emotional appeal to the speakers of a particular speech community. In addition, the use of the local dialect helps speakers to identify themselves more closely with their tradition. At the same time, advertisers, recognizing this emotional link, skillfully and effectively employ the local dialects for commercial reasons.

Taped commercials airing on Cyprus Broadcast Corporation (CBC) radio stations for the last ten years constitute the data for this study. CBC provided tapes and transcripts of randomly chosen commercials. The material was classified according to the linguistic code used and the type of advertised product.

Fasold (1984) in his discussion on societal multilingualism, along with many sociolinguists (Trudgill 1974, Coulmas 1992), supports the idea that multilingualism not only causes problems but also can be a resource. Multilingualism can serve as an

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interactional resource for the multilingual speaker. Since multilingual societies tend to assign different tasks to different languages or language varieties, language users can choose to communicate certain ideas in the language variety they think will yield the most effective results.

The idea that multilingualism is an interactional resource may very well also apply to societies which make use of more than one dialect. The use of one or the other dialect is seldom a random decision and we will see in the case of language use in Cyprus that the choice of Cypriot-Greek (CG) on certain occasions serves very well intended purposes for which other dialects or varieties are not as useful.

Chambers and Trudgill (1980) in their seminal work on dialectology, and in their effort to avoid all misconceptions and prejudices about dialects, posit that all speakers are speakers of at least one dialect. They also add that it doesn't make sense to suppose that any one dialect is any way linguistically superior to any other. CG is one of the many Greek dialects which, along with the dialects of Asia Minor, Crete, Rhodes and the other islands of the East Aegean Sea, constitute the so called eastern dialects of Modern Greek.

The history of Cyprus offers some insights into the development of the dialect. Because of its strategic position between Asia, Africa and Europe the island has changed rulers many times, each

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leaving their mark on the island's culture and language. Cyprus has been part of the empires of Alexander the Great, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Ottomans and the British. Between the 12th and 16th Centuries the island was ruled by the Lusignians of France and the Republic of Venice. Cyprus has only been independent since 1960. The language of each of these rulers has left imprints on the indigenous Greek language which can be detected in the phonology, lexicon, morphology and syntax of the dialect. Additionally, Cyprus is an island and is located relatively far away from continental Greece. These last two factors may account for the fact that CG has retained more elements of ancient Greek than other Greek dialects. A good description of Cypriot Greek is given by Newton (1972).

It is not always easy to decide what is a language and what is a dialect. Sociolinguists say that a language is "a dialect with an army and a navy" thus alluding to the extra-linguistic factors of power that may secure for a dialect the status of a language. Such extra-linguistic parameters in defining a language can be of political, economic, social or historical nature. One clear linguistic criterion is whether the candidates for the dialect-language paradigm are **mutually intelligible.**

The mutual intelligibility criterion presents some difficulties because, according to Chambers and Trudgill, "this criterion admits degrees of more or less". Besides, mutual intelligibility may not be equal in both directions. These two observations are both

relevant to discussions about CG. In terms of directionality, it is generally admitted that a mono-dialectal speaker of Standard Greek (SG) may have difficulty understanding a speaker of CG but not vice versa. The degree of difficulty is subject to factors derived from both speakers. If the SG speaker has had previous experience with CG, it is likely that s/he will have fewer difficulties. If the SG speaker lacks experience with CG, s/he may encounter difficulty understanding this dialect depending on his/her interlocutor.

Most Cypriots are bi-dialectal or tri-dialectal. In each case, dialect one is the dialect of the island and dialects two and three are demotic and katharevousa respectively, which are the varieties involved in the Greek diglossia. SG is used almost exclusively in the mass media and is strongly favored in the education system, the court, and when dealing with the authorities. Thus, the overwhelming majority of Cypriots have at least a passive command of SG (receptive skill). Those who have only a passive command of SG are those who have completed only the nine years of compulsory schooling. (Literacy on Cyprus is almost 100%). Those who continue their education for another three years eventually acquire aural proficiency in SG. The majority of high school graduates on Cyprus continue their studies at the university level. Most of them go to universities in Greece, spending four to five years there. As a result, they become totally bi-dialectal. However, very few lose their Cypriot accent. When the standard Greek speaker has no

experience with CG, the degree of intelligibility depends on how well the Cypriot speaker can modify his or her speech in order to approximate the SG.

AS mentioned earlier, Cyprus is at least a bi-dialectal society. CG is the language of everyday interaction. Educated Cypriots, who usually live in urban areas, use a more moderate version of the dialect which is closer to SG. Less educated Cypriots and people in the countryside employ the pure and actual form of CG which is called **horkatika** (village language).

The point I am making here is that the two dialects co-exist even though SG is favored in some ways. All Cypriots have at least passive knowledge of SG and those who are more educated or live in urban centers can employ SG actively. It seems to be a natural consequence that those who are not that proficient in SG do not really relate to this dialect. For them, SG does not have the emotional appeal of CG. This assumption is relevant to the discussion of the use of CG in radio commercials.

The mass media on Cyprus almost exclusively uses SG while CG is sometimes employed for humorous effect. However, there is a mass media domain in which the use of dialect has a function other than creating humor. This domain is that of advertising. CG is the code in which a small number of radio commercials are broadcast. It is not used for television commercials. As a matter of fact, an attempt to introduce a TV commercial in the Cypriot dialect met with

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such failure that was it withdrawn very shortly after its first appearance on the screen.

Bell (1991) lists a number of examples where foreign languages and dialects are used for various media genres such as news and commercials. The decision to adopt a linguistic code other than the native and the standard can be attributed, according to Bell, to many reasons. The most important reason is that there is " a conscious attempt to 'foreground the interpersonal' to build the relationship between the presenter and the audience".

The question that arises here is: Why is CG chosen for this limited number of commercials? According to Bell (1991), there are three major components in advertising: the product, the medium used to carry out the advertisement such as language, pictures, music, etc., and the targeted audience (or prospective market).

There are three major categories of products that are advertised in CG:

(a) Traditional food products such as baklava, yogurt, Cypriot cheese, Cypriot sausages.

(b) Products that are locally manufactured but are in competition with similarly imported products such as clothing, machines, etc.

(c) Products whose possession indicates the maintenance of traditional values such as purchasing a house for your



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children to make their life easier or preparing a dowry for your daughter.

The second component of advertising is the medium of transmitting the information. In the case of radio commercials, language is very important. And, in cases of multi-dialectal societies, the decision concerning which dialect to use for certain products is very crucial and often very well calculated.

As noted earlier, in Cyprus CG is more strongly favored by a larger portion of the population than SG. Therefore, if the product is more likely to be bought by a certain group, the radio commercial is usually produced using the dialect preferred by that group. In the case under discussion this assumption proves to be true.

The third component of advertising is the target audience. The selection of the linguistic code in which a commercial is going to be broadcast is subject to class-specific considerations. All commercials are tailored to fit the presumed attitudes, values and preferences of the targeted audience. Nowadays major advertising agencies in many countries make use of the findings of sociologists and psychologists to determine which values and images are most likely to appeal to the product's targeted audience. It is not clear whether advertising agencies on Cyprus actually do hire psychologists and sociologists or whether they subconsciously operate on the same assumptions.

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One of the assumptions underlying the use of psychological and sociological profiles is the belief that commercials and other advertisements should work on each listener's need for identity and on the individual's need to expose him or herself to lifestyles and values which confirm the validity of his/her own identity. Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) call this "a signification process whereby a certain commodity is made the expression of a certain content (the lifestyle and values)". The ultimate objective of this signification process is "to attach the desired identity to a specific commodity, so that the need for identity is transformed into a need for the commodity".

Commercial producers also must take into account the fact that listeners filter the impressions bombarding them in order to ensure that the most important ones have access to their consciousness. On the one hand they weed out all the irrelevant impressions; on the other hand, of all potentially relevant messages most likely to be accepted are those which are in agreement with the views and values which consumers already have.

However, one needs to be very careful when defining a class or a group. Cypriot commercials are targeted to rural lower and middle class consumers, both male and female, which emphasize the values of traditional Cypriot society. The most important of these values can be deduced from the content of the commercials themselves.



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The first characteristic is related to food products. Cypriots still like traditional dishes and desserts and give preference to them over foreign food products and dishes. How is this value translated into commercials? The answer is that commercials advertising materials for preparing baklava, spinach pie, and similar desserts and appetizers are in CG. Similar commercials advertising ingredients for nontraditional foods like cheesecake, Black Forest cake, etc. are in SG. People who would buy ingredients for nontraditional dishes are either those who are more acquainted with these products or immigrants. Since they have lived abroad, they are more familiar with SG either because they lived in Greece or because the language spoken in Greek communities of diaspora is SG.

The second characteristic relates to Cypriot versus foreign manufactured products. In cases where the same products are manufactured or are imported from a foreign country, exclusive CG speakers believe that the Cypriot product is at least as good as the imported one and that the price of the Cypriot product is much lower. In one of the commercials recorded a speaker says very explicitly: "Those who buy foreign products that are also produced on Cyprus are just wasting their money."

The third characteristic of the targeted audience, the maintenance of traditional values, deserves some detailed analysis

because it is an abstract value which is manifested in a number of ways.

The family is the nucleus of Cypriot society and the parents' mission in life is to make their children's life as easy as possible. Even though this is probably true for many other societies as well, the generation of Cypriots who are parents today follow this principle in an extreme way. The "well-understood" and "sensible" needs of the children have total priority. One of the possible explanations for this phenomenon is that this is the first generation on Cyprus that can afford material goods. Thirty years ago Cyprus was an underdeveloped colony where people lived in austerity and poverty and were deprived of the commodities available in the more developed countries. Since most parents were poor as children, they now want their children to live as comfortably as possible.

Thus, well-understood priorities are those focusing on family. For example, parents will undergo any sacrifice to provide their daughter with a house when she gets married. This is not because the daughter would not be able to marry without a house or a dowry (something that was required in earlier times) but because starting married life with as few financial worries as possible supposedly guarantees a happier marriage. Some commercials indirectly remind parents of their duties in this regard such as the following commercial where middle-aged friends are talking with each other:

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"When you decide to buy an apartment for your daughter let me tell you which company you should buy it from." Another commercial invites the audience to buy household items such as sheets, curtains, blankets and "other dowry items" for their children.

Another abstract value advertisers use to reach their targeted market is that prospective buyers are listening to the radio not because of the advertising material but because they like to listen to the news or programs they enjoy. To be successful, advertisers must make sure that their commercial is heard, thus commercials need to be made available at the peak listening time. What is crucial in this principle is that the peak time may vary according to the group who is listening, and therefore, commercials must be broadcast at the peak listening time for specifically targeted audiences.

One of the most common characteristics of the CG commercials under discussion is the time in which they are broadcast. With very few exceptions, all CG commercials are scheduled for every Sunday between approximately 10:30 A.M. and 1:00 P.M. There are two reasons for this choice.

First, around noon, almost in the middle of the time period delineated, the most popular radio program is broadcast. The program is called "Cypriot Sketch" and consists of weekly 30-minute, self-contained episodes. It is kind of a radio soap opera in the Cypriot dialect which deals with timely events (usually religious). For example, if tomorrow is the Greek-Orthodox Easter Sunday, the

heroes of tomorrow's sketch will go to church, prepare their Easter dishes and paint their Easter eggs. There is always a moral to the story which, especially since the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, reflects hope, freedom, and determination of the refugees to return to their ancestral land. When there is no religious event to connect with, the sketches address everyday concerns of the farmers, such as the harvest, the time to plough the fields and the market value of their products. However, the program also addresses issues which are of interest to all Cypriots, regardless of social class membership, such as concerns about friends and relatives who live in another country either as immigrants or students, education of the children and the current political climate.

The second reason for broadcasting the commercials between 10:30 A.M. and 1:00 P.M. has to do, again, with Cypriot traditions. The Sunday lunch, which takes place between noon and 1:00 o'clock, is a chance for socialization. In many cases it is the only time of the week when all the members of the family can get together. Neighbors and married children who no longer live with their parents are invited for lunch.

Additionally, at about 10:30 A.M. Sunday, mass is over. After this families go home, the meal is prepared and the table is set. Until lunch is ready, some people sit outside, drink coffee, listen to the radio and chat. Thus, when the "Cypriot sketch" starts, everybody is at the table eating and listening to the soap opera.



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Since the content of the sketch does not require that much thoughtful involvement and the characters and their voices are familiar, the listeners do not need to pay too much attention. Overall the sketch helps create a pleasant atmosphere. Therefore, the timing of the "Cypriot Sketch" and the Sunday meal after mass offers a captive audience for advertisers wishing to market in CG.

Therefore, the answer to our initial question "Why is CG chosen for this limited number of commercials?" is the following. The main reason is that these commercials are targeting a certain audience with a particular way of life. The most conspicuous characteristics related to the commercials is the preference they show to traditional Cypriot products over foreign products and the centrality of traditional family values in their life.

In conclusion, what I have presented is a study focusing on a society where more than one language variety is used. It is common that such societies assign different functions to the various co-existing linguistic codes. This assignment of functions may look like a trivial issue but a careful investigation reveals that very subtle beliefs and values, such as a person's attachment and respect for his or her own tradition, are integral components of societal multilingualism. It has been demonstrated that in the case of language choice for some commercials featured on Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation producers employ the local dialect because they

recognize the emotional appeal that the local dialect bears on its speakers.

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Abstract

The Use of Cypriot-Greek in the Commercials of the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation

This paper will support, on the basis of an analysis of taped commercials from the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation, that in cases of multi-dialectal societies the local dialect has a more emotional appeal to the speakers of the community. In addition, the use of the local dialect helps speakers to identify themselves more closely with their tradition. At the same time, advertisers, recognizing this emotional link, skillfully and effectively employ this dialects for commercial reasons.

In multi-dialectal speech communities the different linguistic codes are reserved for specific domains. Cyprus is at least a bi-dialectal society. The two dialects are Standard Greek with its diglossic nature as spoken in mainland Greece and the local Cypriot-Greek dialect. The two dialects (Standard Greek and Cypriot-Greek) are different on all linguistic levels especially on the phonological and semantic level. Standard Greek is reserved, among other domains, for education, law, the mass-media. However, the code chosen for a small portion of commercials on the Cyprus Broadcasting Cooperation is the local (Cypriot-Greek) dialect.

The most unifying feature of this group of commercials is that they advertise very traditional local products and address ideas very idiosyncratic to the Greek-Cypriot Community.

**Key Words**
Cypriot Greek

dialect

advertising

radio commercials